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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of eighteen members of the Human Rights Council

Note verbale dated 9 October 2015 from the Permanent Mission of the Philippines to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Philippines to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Office of the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations and has the honour to refer to the candidature of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines to the Human Rights Council of the United Nations for the term 2016-2018 at elections to be held during the seventieth session of the General Assembly, in New York.

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Philippines respectfully requests the Office of the President of the General Assembly to circulate the present note and its annex entitled "Candidature of the Philippines to the Human Rights Council, 2016-2018: a tradition of human rights protection, promotion and commitment at the national, regional and international levels" (see annex).

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Annex to the note verbale dated 9 October 2015 from the Permanent Mission of the Philippines to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidature of the Philippines to the Human Rights Council, 2016-2018

A tradition of human rights protection, promotion and commitment at the national, regional and international levels

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

National human rights policy

1. The Government of the Philippines attaches great importance to the promotion and protection of human rights. The Constitution of the Philippines enshrines it as a State policy to value the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for human rights. The Constitution elaborates civil and political rights in the Bill of Rights, has a stand-alone article on social justice and human rights to cover economic, social and cultural rights, and establishes an independent Commission on Human Rights, a national human rights institution.

2. Under the theme "Mainstreaming human rights in development and governance", the second Human Rights Plan 2012-2017 of the Philippines sets the track for mainstreaming human rights in government and the Philippine society. The Human Rights Plan, crafted under the supervision of the Presidential Human Rights Committee, an inter-agency body chaired by the Office of the President, covers the courses of action of the Government of the Philippines in line with its commitments under international human rights treaties. The Philippines has also mainstreamed human rights in the development of policies, plans and programmes through its national development plans, the latest of which is the economic and social growth agenda of the Government. Under the Philippine Development Plan, human rights are a cross-cutting concern, and the human rights-based approach to development is invoked as one of the main guiding principles.

National institutions

3. The Presidential Human Rights Committee is the main inter-agency body of the executive branch of government that coordinates the implementation of international human rights treaty obligations and national policies and programmes on human rights. The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines is an independent national human rights institution that monitors the Government's compliance with its human rights obligations.

Updates on key national legislation, policies and programmes

4. The Philippines recently enacted landmark bills to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights, such as the rights of women through the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012, the rights of the child through the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 and the right to quality education through the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. To further promote the rights of older persons, the Philippines amended the Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010 to provide for

mandatory Philippine health insurance coverage to all senior citizens. The Human Rights Victims Reparation and Recognition Act of 2013 was promulgated to provide for reparation and recognition of victims of human rights violations during the martial law regime of the former President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos. The Philippines also recently adopted a law to protect the rights and promote the welfare of vulnerable sections of the population, such as domestic workers, through the Domestic Workers Act of 2012.

5. The Philippines has continued to give top priority to the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights through continued efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and to strengthening good governance through the sustained implementation of anti-corruption measures. With a development policy framework focused on improving transparency and accountability in governance, improving access to quality social services, enhancing peace and security for development, and ensuring ecological integrity, the Government of the Philippines is investing its resources in its people, with the aim to improve the quality of life of the Filipinos, empower the poor and marginalized and enhance social cohesion as a nation.

Influential role in the elaboration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

6. The Philippines made a lasting contribution to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly on articles on the equal dignity and freedom of all human beings and on non-discrimination.

International human rights instruments

7. The Philippines is a State party to eight core international human rights instruments and six optional protocols, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, which the Philippines acceded to in April 2012.

Constructive member of the Human Rights Council and its subsidiary mechanisms

8. The Philippines was elected as a founding member of the Human Rights Council in 2006 and was re-elected for a second term in 2007, until 2010. The Philippines again served as a member of the Human Rights Council for the term from June 2011 to December 2014.

9. The Philippines continues to believe that the Human Rights Council should be a partner of States and stakeholders in the promotion and protection of human rights by providing a forum for genuine constructive dialogue, with a strong focus on capacity-building and international cooperation on human rights.

10. During the first year of the Council, the Permanent Representative of the Philippines in Geneva facilitated the Open-ended intergovernmental intersessional Working Group to formulate concrete recommendations on the agenda, the annual programme of work, the methods of work as well as rules of procedure of the Human Rights Council, producing an important segment of the Council's institution-building package, as annexed to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1.

11. In June 2008, the Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations in Geneva was elected Vice-President of the Human Rights Council, representing the Asia-Pacific States.

12. The Philippines also actively participated in the review of the Human Rights Council held in 2010/11, offering concrete recommendations to improve the work and functioning of the Council.

13. Philippine experts serve in the Human Rights Council's Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and in the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent.

Universal periodic review

14. The Philippines strongly supports the universal periodic review mechanism of the Human Rights Council. The Philippines firmly believes that the mechanism is a very useful tool in effecting real change on the ground, as it encourages all States Members of the United Nations to engage constructively and to work towards improving the human rights situation in a country, pursuant to its national priorities and international obligations and commitments.

15. The Philippines believes that there is a need for a stronger focus on the provision of international support for capacity-building, to enable countries to better implement their accepted recommendations.

16. The Philippines has undergone two cycles of the universal periodic review, with the involvement of high-level delegations that illustrate the strong commitment of the Government to that process. The delegation of the Philippines in Geneva actively participates in the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review by serving on the troikas and by providing constructive comments and recommendations to the States under review.

Cooperation with treaty monitoring bodies

17. In fulfilment of its commitment to improving its reporting system to the human rights treaty bodies, the Philippines has submitted periodic reports on the implementation of human rights instruments to which it is a State party. Over the past year, the Philippines presented periodic reports to the Committee against Torture, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture visited the Philippines under their confidential inquiry procedures in 2012 and 2015, respectively.

18. The Government of the Philippines takes into account the views and concluding observations of the treaty bodies in the review and improvement of relevant legislation, policies and programmes, as well as in the formulation of its national human rights action plans.

Cooperation with human rights special procedures

19. The Philippines is open to constructive dialogue and cooperation with special procedures of the Human Rights Council. The Philippines is a main sponsor of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, who visited the Philippines in 2012.

20. Early in 2015, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food conducted a visit to the Philippines upon the invitation of the Government. The Philippines has also issued an official invitation to the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons to conduct a visit in 2015.

Contributions to international initiatives on the promotion and protection of human rights and support to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

21. As the main sponsor of the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council on combating trafficking in persons, especially women and children, the Philippines is actively engaged in pushing for stronger normative frameworks and better international collaboration to fight this scourge.

22. The Philippines continues to work with partner countries to ensure that the issue of the adverse impact of climate change on the realization of human rights remains at the forefront of discussions in the Human Rights Council.

23. The Philippines is also a member of the Platform for Human Rights Education and Training that co-sponsors the Human Rights Council resolutions on the implementation of the World Programme for Human Rights Education.

24. Consistent with its belief that the protection of the human rights of the most vulnerable should remain the priority of the Human Rights Council, the Philippines consistently co-sponsors initiatives on issues involving the promotion and protection of the human rights of migrants, children, women, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities.

25. The Philippines also supports the initiatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights related to the protection of the human rights of migrants at international borders.

26. The Philippines, despite being a developing country, annually provides a voluntary financial contribution to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Working with national human rights institutions and civil society

27. The Philippines values the work of its national human rights institution and recognizes the institution's independence and important role in ensuring the Government's implementation of its human rights commitments and obligations.

28. The Government of the Philippines works closely with civil society at both the national and international levels on all human rights issues, conducts consultations in the formulation of relevant legislation, policies and programmes and engages civil society partners in regional and international forums.

Pledges and commitments

29. If re-elected to the Human Rights Council, the Philippines reiterates its commitment to:

(a) Working with all States and stakeholders in a constructive manner, fostering dialogue and cooperation, to make the Human Rights Council more efficient and effective as the prime body of the United Nations mandated to

strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights and to address human rights violations;

(b) Continuing to focus on the importance of meeting national, regional and international human rights goals, standards and strategies;

(c) Continuing to enhance the domestic implementation of all human rights treaty obligations and programmes, especially with regard to the eradication of extreme poverty, respect for the rule of law and the fulfilment of internationally agreed development goals;

(d) Continuing to be a voice for vulnerable groups, including migrants, women and children, and supporting human rights-based approaches that address their concerns in a comprehensive, positive and practical way;

(e) Continuing to be sensitive to current and emerging challenges that impact on human rights, such as climate change, human trafficking and migration;

(f) Continuing its active engagement with the human rights treaty bodies, special procedures and other mechanisms of the Human Rights Council;

(g) Continuing to uphold the universality of the universal periodic review, recognizing its potential to effect real changes on the ground through constructive dialogue and international cooperation;

(h) Continuing to support the important work of national human rights institutions;

(i) Continuing to have meaningful interaction and cooperation with civil society stakeholders on human rights issues, at both the national and international levels;

(j) Continuing to promote international initiatives on human rights, such as those on combating trafficking in persons, promoting human rights education and training, or discussions on the realization of the right to development, and to work closely with and support the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in this regard;

(k) Remaining actively engaged in regional human rights mechanisms and supporting efforts to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations region.